

March 27, 1967

Dr. Davis B. Bobrow
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Dear Dr. Bobrow:

I was very much interested to receive your letter of March 21 with its sympathetic comments about my writing on eutechnics. I do concur with the five points that you numbered, though I have to say that there is another face to each of them. For example, while peer-evaluation is extremely conservative constraint, it also furnishes a mechanism for the evaluation of merit. One of the most serious objections to a dedication of effort to prophetic speculation is how can we tell the genius from the chaflatan?

The dynamism you express on the second page of your letter is highly inspiring. I would have to place somewhat higher confidence in the young than you express, though I would admit that we have to find better mechanisms for channeling their energies. And I would appreciate it if you could enlighten me by enlarging on what you meant by "pilot efforts, for example, Harold Lasswell".

The trouble with a demonstration of humanics is that we have ill-prepared ourselves by our own education to tackle such a task! I have come to the conclusion that the most effective contribution that I can make personally is to continue my own education and to encourage others to do likewise. At Stanford this is reflected in the theme of continuing efforts to cement the medical school into the university as an instrument of far greater consequence than for the professional training of physicians, the teaching of undergraduates majoring in humanities in the principles of human biology, as much catalysis as I am able to mediate in the communication between social scientists and life scientists, and in my own writings. I wonder, by the way, if you will have noticed that the Oak Ridge Tennessean has started to run my weekly column, which started quite a few months ago in the Washington Post. I do believe that the university must remain, or rather, become the focus of efforts at critical optimization, not that it is now so very well equipped, but that if it fails to respond, the effort cannot succeed.

Bob Row

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Do these fluctuations fit your concept of a "demonstration"? If not, why don't you tell me a little more explicitly what you had in mind.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics